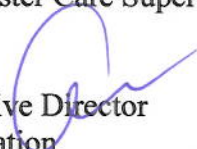


**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201**

DATE: March 29, 2013

POLICY DIRECTIVE: SSA # 13-16

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services,
Assistant Directors and Foster Care Supervisors, Social
Services Finance Offices

FROM: Carnitra D. White, Executive Director
Social Services Administration 

RE: Resource Parent Home Study Process

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Out-of-Home Placement Services (Foster Care Services)
And Resource Units

ORIGINATION OFFICE: Resource Development Placement and Support Services

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Implement Policy and Procedures

ACTION DUE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: Anita Wilkins, Manager
Resource Development and
Placement Support Services,
Inter State Compact
410-767-7119

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy directive is to clarify the procedures for completing the resource home study process when selecting and studying a family's ability to parent and address the needs of children in out-of-home placement. The resource family home study process provides local departments with the opportunity to assess a family's potential for resource parenthood, while allowing the prospective resource family to assess their own capacity to be resource parents.

BACKGROUND

In 1985, Maryland developed a Home Study process for the purpose of determining ones suitability for fostering or adopting children in out-of-home placement. The home study process combined the Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPPS) and a curriculum from the University of Florida. With this home study method, prospective foster and adoptive parents received a foundation to prepare them to care for children in out-of-home placement.

In 2003, Maryland implemented the use of the Parent Resource for Information Development and Education Foster and Adoptive Parent Pre-Service Training Curriculum (PRIDE) as part of its home study process. The Child Welfare League of America, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, foster parents, staff from public and private agencies, educators, and other professionals partnered together to develop PRIDE. With the inclusion of PRIDE, foster and adoptive parents were viewed as a valued part of the Child Welfare professional team. Teamed with local department staff, foster and adoptive parents became PRIDE co-trainers.

Over the years multiple improvements have been made to the home study process. The safety, wellbeing and permanency needs of children in out-of-home placement have always been the driving force to positive change with Maryland's home study process. In 2006, the addition of the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) Pilot Project incorporated a methodical psychosocial evaluation into Maryland's home study process. In 2009, the Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration contracted with the Consortium for Children, making SAFE Maryland's chosen home study model.

ACTIONS: THE PUBLIC RESOURCE FAMILY HOME STUDY PROCESS**COMAR Regulations**

Recent changes to the Annotated Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) have improved the Resource Parent Home Study process. When conducting a resource parent home study, information relevant to the process can be found in COMAR 07.02.25.04, Technical Requirements for Resource Home Approval and Reapproval; COMAR 07.02.25.05, Resource Parent Standards; COMAR 07.02.25.06, Resource Home Study Process; COMAR 07.02.25.08, Responsibilities of a Resource Parent; COMAR 07.02.25.09, Local Department responsibilities to the Resource Parent; COMAR 07.02.25.10, Provisions for Kinship Care; COMAR 07.02.25.11, Restricted Resource Homes; COMAR 07.02.25.12, Provisional Approval of Restricted Relative resource Homes; COMAR 07.02.25.14, Resource Parent Training; COMAR 07.02.25.18, Denial of Approval and COMAR 07.02.25.20, Discipline of a Foster Child.

IV- E Requirements for Adoption Home Studies

Maryland receives Federal IV-E funding. The Maryland Department of Human Resources requires that local departments of social services study prospective resource families interested in adoption. Prospective resource families referred by AdoptUSKids shall not be refused a home study because they are interested solely in adoption.

Prioritizing Public Resource Family Home Studies

Local departments of social services shall have the option to prioritize the order in which prospective resource families are studied. A prospective resource family shall receive a home study based upon the families flexibility, the type of child they can parent and the needs of the children coming into out-of-home placement. The chronological order in which a family contacts the local department to seek a home study need not be a factor in determining the order in which prospective resource families are studied.

Method of Resource Home Study

1. The resource home study process shall consist of home visits, assessment, training and evaluation.
2. It is expected that the prospective resource parent shall:
 - Sign the application and consent to release confidential information forms;
 - Complete the required materials in the application;
 - Complete the required pre-service training; and
 - Satisfy the minimum requirements in COMAR 07.02.25.04, Technical Requirements for Resource Home Approval and Reapproval.
3. As stated in the previous section, Informational Meetings may be counted toward the required 27 hours of pre-service training.
4. Specific requirements of the resource worker:
 - Conduct 3 or more home visits with each prospective resource parent and the entire family (including the children residing in the home), conduct a dialogue regarding the required training and tour the prospective home;
 - Ensure that the required personal references shall consist of 2 personal references and only 1 reference can be a relative. A consent form for the references shall be secured by the applicant. School personnel references shall be secured for all school aged children residing in the home;
 - Have a discussion concerning the Department's policies on discipline; child abuse and neglect, physical or sexual victimization by another child, and the responsibility of the resource parent to provide safety for all children residing in the resource home;
 - Acquire income verification, if applicable, marital status verification, a health and sanitary inspection, by the local Health Department, a CPS background check, and an evaluation of the results of the State and Federal criminal background checks;
 - Secure the fire safety approval, conduct pre-service training while ensuring that the prospective family has all necessary training materials, check for

child support arrears and assess if child support arrears can be corrected or if it will affect the applicant's ability to provide foster care.

Information to be Shared With Prospective Resource Parents

A home study shall provide in-depth information about foster care and adoption to a prospective resource parent: The required information to be shared consists of pertinent topics designed to prepare the prospective resource parent to meet the needs of children in out-of-home placement, while providing them with safety, permanency and well-being.

The definition of the goals of Foster Care and Adoption: The goals of foster care and adoption emphasize that foster children are safe and placed in permanent living arrangements within 15 months from the date they enter foster care. According to the Out of Home Placement Services Program Manual, the goals of out-of-home placement ensure that safety, permanency and well-being of the child are primary considerations in all LDSS case work decisions. Additionally, the goals of foster care and adoption include the alleviation of the conditions in the family that led to the need for out-of-home placement. Essential to the goals of foster care and adoption is the need to increase the number of resource parents willing to work with birth families and assist teenagers in the foster care system in becoming self-sufficient.

The differences between parenting a foster child, parenting one's own child and parenting an adoptive child: When providing safety and well-being, the manner in which a resource parent is expected to parent a foster child, their own child or an adoptive child should be similar. Preparation for the arrival of a foster child into a resource home should include but is not limited to education, training and effective communication.

Reasons children are placed in foster care: Children are temporarily placed in foster care for reasons of abuse, neglect, abandonment, developmental delay and mental illness. Children in foster care are often the victims of unfortunate circumstances. A foster child's greatest need is for a permanent family where he/she can be loved and cared for by trained, compassionate, caring, committed individuals.

The characteristics of children needing foster care placement and adoption, including problems and needs: Children needing foster care or adoption are victims of abuse, neglect and have been subject to environments that included domestic violence or substance abuse. Many children needing foster care or adoption have special needs and their well-being has been jeopardized by physical, mental and developmental health problems. The children desire to maintain connections with their families and can be of any age, race or sex.

Teens and pre-teens enter foster care for the same reasons that younger children do. However, the older youth stay in foster care for a longer period of time and receive Transitioning Youth Services to prepare them to be ready by age 21.

The characteristics of birth parents, their rights and responsibilities and visitation: Birth parents often have experienced a crisis characterized by issues related to domestic violence, homelessness, substance abuse, mental health, physical health and a break down within their

family system. With support, direction, and authority, the foster child's caseworker shall provide services to the birth parent with the purpose of achieving reunification. A birth parent has the right to:

- Participate in the decision making process regarding their child's placement;
- Be introduced to the child's resource parent (as long as it does not pose a danger to the child or resource parent);
- Have communication with the child's caseworker;
- File a petition and/or an appeal with Juvenile Court for the return of the child;
- Be represented by an attorney;
- Receive appropriate services;
- Play a part in some major decisions in the child's life;
- Receive reunification services from the local department;
- Participate in court reviews, administrative reviews or citizen reviews;
- Receive notice of judicial hearings;
- Have visits with the child; and
- Within 60 days, arrive at a decision regarding the child's permanency plan.

The role and responsibilities of resource parent's to their foster child; the birth parents; the local department and the resource parent's own family: The resource parent is responsible for providing age appropriate parental supervision, guidance, proper nutrition, adequate clothing and shelter. The resource parent is expected to assist the child with coping with separation anxiety and stress. The resource parent shall practice cultural competence concerning the child's own values, religious beliefs and customs. The child shall be included in family activities and the resource parent shall set clear limits when needed and provide transportation.

In accordance with the child's case plan, the resource parent is required to provide assistance to the local department in establishing a supportive relationship with the birth parents, through role modeling, sharing of information and events in the child's life and assisting with family visits. To fulfill the resource parent's responsibility to the local department, the resource parent shall complete the required training, act as a member of the Child Welfare professional team in case plan development, attend case reviews and notify the local department of changes within the resource family. For additional details refer to COMAR 07.02.25.08, Responsibilities of a Resource Parent.

The role and responsibilities of the local department to the resource family, birth family, and the foster child: The local department is responsible for providing resource parents with accurate, timely information regarding the child. A Health Passport shall be made available to a resource parent for each child placed in the resource home. The local department shall provide supportive services, training, respond to a pending crisis in the resource home and participate in the development of service agreements. All resource parents are to be assisted in knowing and understanding their rights and responsibilities.

The local department is responsible for assessing and reassessing the resource parent's competence through the initial approval and re-approval home study process. The local

department shall provide the resource parent with the foster child's information, resource parent rights and responsibilities, board rates, clothing allowance, training, supportive services, crisis intervention, visitation plan and preparation for the foster child's departure from the resource home. Additional information relevant to this topic can be found in COMAR 07.02.25.09, Local Department Responsibilities to the Resource Parent.

The local department shall encourage the birth family to participate in the permanency planning process and in the development of the service agreement. Reunification and supportive services shall be provided. Regular meetings shall be scheduled to discuss the child's permanency goals.

The local department has the responsibility to make certain that foster children are placed in resource homes within their own communities. By receiving placements in their own communities, foster children are afforded the opportunity to maintain connections with their home school, friends, family and resources. The expectation is that all foster children will be placed in permanent living arrangements within a maximum of 15 months from the date they enter foster care.

The impact foster care and adoption may have on the applicant's own family:

Information on the effect of resource parenting on the resource family unit shall be supplied to the prospective parent. In order to provide safety, permanency and wellbeing to foster children placed in resource homes, it is essential to educate and prepare the entire resource family unit for the resource home experience. Prior to approval, the home study worker shall encourage the prospective resource parents to:

- Explore their children's feelings associated with their home being used as a resource home;
- Explore their children's feelings regarding the sharing of their parents and their home with children in out-of-home placement;
- Include their own children in the approval process by discussing with them, what has been learned in pre-service training and other aspects of the home study process;
- Communicate the importance of confidentiality regarding children in out-of-home placement;
- Teach their children to be empathetic (putting themselves in the shoes of children in out-of-home placement); and
- Together with their children, make Welcome Home Books for the foster children who will be placed in their home.

The impact that separation and placement have on the child, birth family and resource family:

Both children and birth parents can experience separation, grief and personal loss when a child is placed in foster care. Separation, grief and loss are painful experiences for a child. The recovery time of having to deal with painful losses can be long. Children experiencing grief and loss typically present as sad or angry and often exhibit behaviors that may be detrimental to themselves, others or property. With knowledge, understanding and a team approach, the resource parent shall let the child know that their needs and feelings are valued and can be expressed in positive ways. Additional materials on separation, grief and loss, attachment development, attachment disorders and how resource parents can help to build positive

attachment for foster children placed in their homes shall be provided during the home study process.

Before a child is placed with a resource family, careful consideration is given to the family structure, parenting skills of the resource family, locality of the resource family and the resource family's ability to meet the needs of children in out-of-home placement.

Planning documents (permanency plan, case plan and service agreement): The State of Maryland Caseplan for Children is intended to meet the permanency, safety, and well-being needs of children in out-of-home placement. It is required that there is a State of Maryland Caseplan for Children for every child in out-of-home placement. Case planning gives the family an opportunity to participate in the services and permanency goals for the child and family. The supportive services offered are developed based upon the strengths and needs of the family. The Caseplan includes timelines, goals and objectives. There may be frequent assessment and reassessment of the expected outcomes. The Caseplan document is divided into four sections, Caseplans 1, 2, 3 and 4.

A service agreement is a document developed by the child's caseworker for the purpose of developing the tasks to be completed by the family to achieve goals and outcomes necessary for reducing safety risks for a child. Caseplan 3 is a service agreement. The service agreement contains the parent/child visitation schedule. The parents, legal guardian, their attorney and the child's attorney shall receive a signed copy of the Caseplan 3.

The minimum requirements for resource home approval: COMAR 07.02.25.04, The Technical Requirements for Resource Home Approval and Reapproval and COMAR 07.02.25.05 Resource Parent Standards are guidelines set forth by regulation for the purpose of the recruitment of resource parents to meet the needs of children in out-of-home placement and the processes necessary to complete the resource home approval. Also emphasized are the unique characteristics and rules that govern resource parents.

The prospective resource parent applicant shall be at least 21 years old. The applicant and family members age 18 and above shall undergo medical examinations, tuberculosis tests, criminal and Protective Services background checks. The applicant shall agree to a child support clearance; health and sanitary approval which includes a lead paint and dust inspection, meet general safety standards which include fire arm safety standards, prescription and household chemicals, window covering standards and fossil fuel standards. The applicant shall be assessed for financial stability and compliance with fire safety standards. All homes being assessed shall have working smoke detectors, adequate sleeping and living quarters, meet compliance for licensed, immunized age appropriate pets, provide legal and safe transportation and meet the safety standards for swimming pools, hot tubs, spas, waterfront property, fish and duck ponds and similar bodies of water. The resource parent is required to have a person certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) at the swimming pool and water recreation area when a foster child is present.

According to the regulations, the resource parent shall practice the principles of good child care by maintaining a positive, supportive, encouraging atmosphere, one which promotes social

emotional, educational and cultural growth for the child. Additionally, the resource parent shall comply with the requirements for alternative plans for supervision.

An alternative plan for supervision of children under the age of 12 years old while the resource parent is employed or at school shall be approved by the local department. The alternative child care provider shall be licensed by the Maryland Office of Child Care or any agency that complies with the standards of the Maryland Office of Child Care. The alternative child care provider shall have a criminal background and a child protective services background check. Local department approval is required for all other reasons, that a resource parent might request alternative child care.

Different types of resource homes:

- Regular Resource Home – An approved resource home providing 24 hour care for children that do not have need of unusual care and supervision;
- Emergency Resource Home - A temporary placement for children/youth with an emergency care need;
- Respite Resource Home – An approved home that provides short term care;
- Intermediate Resource Home – An approved resource home in which the special needs of a child requires a resource parent to provide unusual care and supervision; The resource parent receives a supplemental payment for meeting the special needs of a child;
- Public Agency Treatment Resource Home (**This only applies to local departments operating a TFC program**) – Designed to provide intensive treatment and casework services in an approved family setting to meet the child's needs; and
- Private Child Placement Agency – Contracts with the Department of Human Resources to provide foster care, adoption, and/or Independent Living Services to children with special needs.

The order of priority of permanency planning:

- Reunification: Return to parents or legal guardian;
- Adoption by relative;
- Adoption by non-relative;
- Custody and Guardianship;
- Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

Adoptive resource consideration: When a resource parent has provided continuous foster care to a child for at least one (1) year or more and the child is or has become legally free for adoption, the local department will give the resource family priority consideration as an adoptive resource.

The legal, technical, procedural, financial and educational aspects of Child Placement:

Legal representation, judicial hearings and court orders are associated with the placement of a child in out-of-home placement. The local department is mandated to place a child in the least restrictive setting appropriate to the child's needs. All efforts shall be made to place siblings together. The following are documents to be provided when a child is placed in a resource home:

- Health Passport;

- Child Placement Form;
- Service Agreement; and
- Visitation Plan.

The child's caseworker shall carry out a clothing and supplies needs assessment of the child's belongings and subsequently provide funds with which to purchase what is required using the one-time initial clothing allowance. The child's caseworker shall authorize payment for the resource home, certify the child for medical assistance, begin a Title IV-E eligibility evaluation and when it is not feasible for a child to remain in their original school, arrange for a school transfer.

Case review process (Internal Reviews and the Citizen Review Board): Local departments conduct internal reviews to assess for compliance in service delivery. The Child Welfare Accountability Act of 2006 increased legislative oversight of the Maryland Quality Assurance processes in Child Welfare. Quality Assurance processes in Maryland replicate the Federal Child Welfare monitoring processes and include local self assessment, onsite review, and a program improvement plan.

The Citizens Review Board for Children provides oversight to local departments and trains volunteer citizen panels. The Citizen Review Board reviews and coordinates the activities of the local Review Boards. The local Review Boards evaluate local department for compliance with standards in achieving permanency for children in foster care. The Review Board makes recommendations to the General Assembly on ways to improve permanency outcomes.

Discipline process: The resource parent shall maintain clear expectations when setting limits regarding the negative behavior of a foster child. Corporal punishment and other extreme forms of discipline are prohibited. Pre-service training provides a framework for managing a child's negative behavior and utilizing appropriate discipline techniques. Two hours of in-service behavioral management training is a requirement of all approved resource parents.

Pre-service training requirements (27 hours) and In-service training requirements (10 hours per year): It is required that all prospective resource parent applicants complete a 27 hour PRIDE pre-service training. The initial 3 hour Informational meeting may be counted toward the required 27 hours of pre-service training. The PRIDE pre-service training is designed to prepare resource parents to manage such things as building positive relationships with the birth family, assist with visitation, assist with medical, dental and psychological care, provide clothing and toiletry needs. The resource parent will develop the competency and skill to problem solve, become a member of a professional team, practice legal and ethical standards, and deal appropriately with negative behaviors as they arise. Attendance is mandatory.

In the past prospective resource parents were expected to complete 6 hours of continuing education training. As required by recent changes to COMAR regulations, the continuing education hours requirement has been increased to 10 hours or more per reconsideration year. Two hours of in-service behavioral management training shall be completed every other year.

When a Home is Recommended for Approval or Denial

Provisional Approval of Restricted Relative Resource Homes: Provisional Approval of a restricted relative resource home is a temporary emergency approval which is valid for only 120 days. Provisional approval may only be granted to a relative of a child in out-of-home placement. A relative is characterized as an individual who is related to a child by blood or marriage within five degrees of consanguinity or affinity. A relative must be at least twenty-one years of age or eighteen years of age and reside with a spouse who is at least 21 years of age. Relatives shall be given priority consideration for a foster child in need of placement.

1. To receive a Provisional Approval, a relative shall undergo an expedited home inspection as outlined in COMAR 02.07.25.10 E and COMAR 02.07.25.12. An assessment of the home shall meet the health and safety requirements of COMAR 02.07.25.04.
2. The prospective provisional restricted relative shall:
 - Sign a written statement acknowledging that they understand the Administration's Discipline Policy as is specified in COMAR 07.02.25.20, Discipline of a Foster Child;
 - Sign an authorization for release of medical information;
 - Sign a certification which states that there is no criminal record or indicated findings of child abuse or neglect;
 - Undergo criminal background checks for themselves and anyone residing in the home 18 years or older;
 - Agree to submit to child protective services clearances; and
 - Exercise compliance with completing all requirements within the specified time frame.
3. The local department shall:
 - Complete all items in COMAR 02.07.25.10 E within 5 days of placement;
 - Complete a health and safety assessment as is outlined in COMAR 02.07.25.04;
 - Obtain all required signed documents and character references;
 - After all requirements have been met, approve the home as a provisional restricted home;
 - After 120 days, and after all requirements have been met, approve the provisional restricted home as a restricted resource home;
 - Revoke a provisional approval if all of the requirements have not been completed within 120 days and the restricted resource parent has received reasonable notice but has not been compliant with completing the requirements in the specified time frame; and
 - Deliver a letter of revocation to the restricted resource parent with notice of action, grounds for action and information regarding the appeal process, seven days prior to the date of revocation.
4. COMAR 02.07. 25.12, Provisional Approval of Restricted Relative Resource Homes, does not apply to ICPC home study referrals.

Recommended Approval or Denial

1. A child shall not be placed in a home prior to the approval of the resource home.
2. The prospective resource parent shall be notified in writing of the local department's decision (approval or denial) within 120 days of the acceptance of the application.
3. If the prospective resource parent does not agree with the department's decision, they shall be given the right to file an appeal.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) Home Studies

An ICPC home study request shall have the highest priority of all home studies. A home study request from another State under ICPC for a relative placement, foster care, or adoption shall be:

- Forwarded to the appropriate local department within **5 calendar days** of receipt at the Maryland ICPC Office;
- Completed by the local department and returned to the Maryland ICPC Office within **45 calendar days** of receipt; and
- Forwarded to the requesting state within **60 calendar days** from the date of receipt of the request at the Maryland ICPC Office.

MD CHESSIE Application of the Home Study Process

All items pertaining to the SAFE Resource Parent Home Study Process are to be scanned and then stored in the MD CHESSIE file cabinet. The following documents should be filed in the MD CHESSIE file cabinet:

- SAFE Questionnaire I;
- SAFE Questionnaire II;
- SAFE home study;
- Approval letter;
- Correspondence;
- Court orders; and
- Any other relevant documentation.